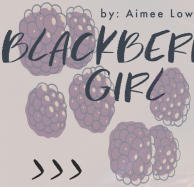
by: Aimee Lowenstern

BLACKBERRY GIRL



That summer, I was more scab than skin; knicked all over from climbing trees and picking wildflowers and walking barefoot in the river. I didn’t mind. When I noticed a cut, I would take a blackberry seed between my fingers and tuck it, carefully, into the red slit of flesh. I winced, but I took crude delight in sucking the iron off my hands.

Weeks later, the shiny pink spot rose like a pimple, and curls of foliage burst from my body. New blood swelled at the stem. It felt good, like cracking your knuckles. And I loved to see them grow. They wove bracelets down my arm--

The small pink blossoms made the prettiest charms. When they were ripe, I gave the fruit to the girl with the blackberry hair. All of it.

She lived down the lane, and her eyes were so bright you could swear they were fireflies. Her dad was a beekeeper. She told me she was training the bees to land all over her skin and cover her whole body with fuzzy dancing stripes. The key was to put the queen bee in your mouth. She was always stung, though, dimpled welts across her shoulders and cheeks. I taught her how to soothe them with thyme and lavender oil.

The bees lived in a row of small wooden houses. We named the colonies after queens: Victoria, Persephone, Nefertiti. They would hover around me, nuzzle their heads against my flowers. She said their honey would be made of me, that maybe it would be as sweet as me. I laughed loud. I had never been sweet. She said I was, that I had to admit I was blackberry-sweet at the least. I said she was sweeter than blackberries or honey or anything at all.

On the last day of summer, I ran to her house. The days and months had stretched ahead of us, making mirages in the heat, but now they were gone. There was only so much honeysuckle that hadn’t been sucked dry, and the roots of my vines were knitting tight around my bones.

She turned to me, blackberry staining her lips. I did not stop moving. I kissed her. I kissed her and she melted like honey, and she kissed me and a bee flew into my mouth.

I could barely feel the legs and wings fluttering against my skin as bees obscured our form. That was just how I was around her: buzzing. The queen bee landed at the seam of our lips, and we were not stung once.

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